

Public participation and values in regional innovation

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This document is an assemblage of the slides and the transcription of a lecture I gave on May 31st 2021 as part of the "Economic and Political Spaces of Innovation" course (Dr. Alexander Wentland, Munich Center for Technology in Society).

My lecture was designed as to provide an overview of the research I conducted through my PhD (Macq, 2020). It was also an attempt at vulgarizing the research that had been published in two articles I co-authored (Delvenne & Macq, 2020; Macq et al., 2020).

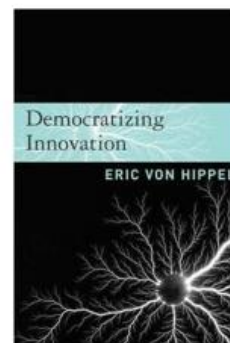
This document is therefore primarily conceived as an add-on to my published research. If needed, the latter should be cited.

I began my journey as a PhD student at a time when innovation practices were increasingly presented as evolving.

From linear to democratized innovation?



"Science discovers, genius invents, industry applies, and man adapts himself"
(Guide officiel, cite dans Gleisten 2002, p. 37)



"Innovation is rapidly becoming democratized. Users (...) increasingly can develop their own new products and services" (Von Hippel 2015)

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You might be familiar with the picture on the left. It is coming from a promotional booklet of the Chicago World Fair in 1933. The motto of that World Fair was: "Science discovers, genius invents, industry applies, and man adapts himself". This motto got famous because it perfectly expresses what was the widely shared conception of innovation and technological development at that time: a linear process which concerns a limited number

of actors and that leaves to the major part of "Society" the only role of adapting itself to new developments.

This conception of innovation conflicts with the one illustrated by the picture on the right side, which is the cover of a book originally published in 2005.

In this book, von Hippel (2005) states that "innovation is rapidly becoming democratized. Users (...) increasingly can develop their own new products and services". In this vision of innovation, the gap between society and innovation-making seems to be somehow bridged. At least a part of Society, people called "users", are said to increasingly participate in innovation processes.

So, I became interested in scrutinizing this "democratization of innovation", to see where it comes from, what forms it takes, how it unfolds, and what does it produce.

I'll keep it brief on the theoretical side, but this is important so that you understand on what literature and concepts I relied, and what were my ambitions.

Theoretical background and ambitions



- Innovation growingly presented and analysed as a participatory process (Laurent et al. 2018);
- From alternatives to (Callon et al. 2009; Joly et al. 2011) to components of innovation policies (Macq et al. 2020; Delvenne and Macq 2020);
- Connect participatory processes to the political machine (Felt & Fochler 2010; Laurent 2016);
- Co-production (Jasanoff 2004) of participatory innovation initiatives and the broader political-economic context in which they take place (Engels et al. 2019)

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As I just said, innovation is growingly presented and analyzed as a participatory process (Laurent et al., 2018), which broadly speaking means that a variety of actors – a variety of 'publics', as the literature often calls them - now more and more often participate in innovation-making.

What is more: those practices are more and more taken up by public authorities and included in policies. They have moved from being alternatives to (Callon et al., 2009; Joly et al., 2011)... to components of official innovation policies (Delvenne & Macq, 2020; Macq et al., 2020).

I therefore relied on an important literature in STS that has analyzed public participation in science and technology and that claimed for the need to connect participatory processes to the political machine (Felt & Fochler, 2010; Laurent, 2016). That is, analyzing the conception and promotion of participation, seeing why it matters and to whom, how it is mobilized by different actors, how it is enacted, what purposes it serves, and so on and so forth.

In other words, my work, as part of the work that is being done by colleagues at TUM, is to analyze the co-production (Jasanoff, 2004) of participatory innovation initiatives and the broader political economic context in which they take place (Engels et al., 2019).

To do that, I started by analyzing public participation through its inclusion and its evolution in the European Commission's innovation policies.

Participatory innovation at the EC



From participation as **deliberation**...



... to participation as **production**



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This story is at the core of one of the papers I co-authored (Macq et al., 2020) but what I highlighted is a gradual evolution of the way participation in science and technology has been conceived and promoted by the European Commission. While participation, in the early 2000's was conceived as the inclusion of lay citizens in deliberative processes about science and technology policies, in the purpose of enriching these policies, at the turn of 2010 it increasingly became conceived as the inclusion of citizens and users in productive processes of technological development.

Evolving conception of participation located in a particular institutional context



- Aftermath of the 2008 crisis → Focus on economic (re)deployment
- Inclusion of society *upstream* of technological development... to enable more and better marketable innovative products
- (Participatory) innovation articulated to the 'Future of Europe' → Producing products AND society



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I will not come back to the whole paper here but what matters for now is that this evolution in the way participation has been conceived and promoted happened in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, at a time when European policy-makers were looking for economic redeployment of the EU. Moreover, this evolution was also rooted in important dynamics within the European institution, in terms of which policy officers and scholars got heard and impacted policies.

Overall, the second conception of participation I just presented seeks to include society (or at least a particular conception of it) upstream of technological development to enable the production of more and better marketable innovative products. Participatory innovation, in this particular context, was essentially a means to foster innovation for the sake of the European economy.

What is also interesting when analyzing participatory innovation at the EC is that it is directly articulated to the "Future of Europe". It is an integral part of how political leaders portray what Europe as a society will become, or has to become. In that sense, participatory innovation is not just about producing products, but it is also about producing the very society in which it is conceived and promoted.

From that point, I became interested in knowing more about how participatory innovation becomes entrenched to a region's own definition of its future. And so, I pursued my analysis in Wallonia, where, as soon as in 2010, public authorities incorporated participatory innovation as a component of the region's innovation and economic policies, and linked it to new visions of the Walloon society as a whole.

Wallonia



Creative Wallonia



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Analyzing the emergence of participatory innovation in Wallonia requires to take a look at previous innovation policies in the region.

Innovation policies in Wallonia



- 1980s – 2000s: funding of scientific research and industry as isolated sectors;
- 2005: fostering collaboration between academia and industries (Marshall Plan – Competitiveness clusters)
 - Articulating innovation to the future of Wallonia as an autonomous entity
 - Leaving society at bay
- Involving society in innovation-making: Creative Wallonia (2010); Digital Wallonia (2015)



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This story starts in the early 1980 's, when Wallonia got independent competences in terms of economic and innovation policies. For the first 20 years, Walloon authorities started to fund scientific research and industry separately, as isolated sectors.

In 2005, this started to change, as authorities launched major programs that sought to foster collaboration between academia and industries. They drew from the worldwide burgeoning 'competitiveness clusters' and promoted a vision of innovation as involving three main actors: public authorities that provide funds, and the academia and industries that work hand in hand to produce innovative products. In that time, innovation became articulated to the future of Wallonia as an autonomous entity, whose autonomy was important beyond Belgium, in the global competition between territories, and within Belgium, where it had to compete with the other major region of the country: Flanders. However, with regards to what occupies us today, these policies still left society at bay in innovation-making processes.

The main change in that respect happened in 2010, when political leaders launched a framework-program for economy and innovation called "Creative Wallonia".

Creative Wallonia's genesis and ambitions



- Diagnoses: Wallonia lagging behind in the global competitiveness race + spread of open innovation
- Influenced by theories of 'creative cities' (HEC Montreal);



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This program was designed as a response to two main diagnoses. First, a self-perception of Wallonia as a lagging region in the global race for competitiveness, which was considered even more dramatic in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Public authorities were therefore eager to do something different, something more than the previous innovation policies.

Second, the global spread of participatory models of innovation. And among these models, Walloon policy makers were heavily influenced by theories of 'creative economy' and 'creative cities' developed in Montreal (see for example Cohendet & Simon, 2008). Following these theories, Society is divided into two main layers.

First, you have the Upperground, which is composed of big companies and the public sector. This layer has been instrumental in driving innovation for a long time but it is said to lack inspiration, fresh ideas. It needs a boost to innovate again.

Then, you have the Underground, which is composed of citizens conceived as "creative". They have fresh ideas that could ultimately lead to new products and services, but they have no connection to the Upperground, so that this innovation potential remains inactivated.

What you therefore want, as a public authority, is to create links between these two layers. And to do so, you need to create a Middleground, composed of a variety of sites (spaces, events, methods) that will close the gap between creative citizens and more established actors of innovation.

Participatory innovation therefore appeared as a set of new practices that could allow to do something more, something different than the previous innovation policies. In the end, it was about "exploiting the breeding ground of Creative Citizens to foster innovation".

Developping an innovative society



- New vision of innovation: more than increasing R&D investments → changing the mental attitudes of citizens, making them contribute to innovation-making

The idea was (...) something like '**sowing the seeds of creativity to develop innovation throughout the territory**', so it's about empowering people, this notion of **empowerment**, because everyone is creative, it's not just saying 'it's creativity for universities' or 'it's creativity for companies', **it's about strengthening the creative capacities of Walloon citizens so that we can see the results in terms of producing innovation** (Personal interview, July 2017, my translation).

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These theories, taken up by Walloon public authorities, carry a new vision of innovation and of the role of public authorities in its production: it is about doing more than increasing research and development investments; it is about changing the mental attitudes of citizens, making them contribute to innovation-making. As this quote by a policy officer expresses:

The idea was (...) something like '**sowing the seeds of creativity to develop innovation throughout the territory**', so it's about empowering people, this notion of **empowerment**, because everyone is creative, it's not just saying 'it's creativity for universities' or 'it's creativity for companies', **it's about strengthening the creative capacities of Walloon citizens so that we can see the results in terms of producing innovation** (Personal interview, July 2017, my translation).

When we take look back at the way Wallonia conceives itself with regards to participatory innovation, we see that the latter in part of a collective vision of a desirable future involving science, technology, and innovation, what Jasanoff and Kim (2015) call a “sociotechnical imaginary”.

Participatory innovation as part of a sociotechnical imaginary (Jasanoff & Kim 2015)



“Turning Wallonia into a creative and innovative society”



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Participatory innovation is both what this bright future is said to be made of, and what is supposed to allow for this future to come into being. This vision finds its roots in Wallonia's past, when the region was one of the wealthiest in the World due to its steel industries. Hence the political will to turn this deindustrialized region into "a Creative and innovative" one.

Delving into sites of participatory innovation



- Influenced by 'travelling' models that are adapted in local contexts
 - Set up in domains pre-identified as key for the development of Wallonia
 - Bridging the valley of death of innovation (ensuring marketability)
 - "From ideas to start-ups"
 - Forced to show economic results and viability (funding)

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As further analyzed in the second paper (Delvenne & Macq, 2020), this imaginary is not floating in the air, it is performed and activated through the setting up of sites of participatory innovation through Wallonia. You will find more details and analyses of these sites in the paper but, to put it briefly, they are illustrative of how participation is geared towards economic values and purposes: they are set up in domains that have been identified as key for the economic development of Wallonia; participatory innovation practices in those sites seek to produce more and better marketable products but also to help develop new entrepreneurial projects; and the funding of these sites often force them to be economically viable, which means that they often have to centered their activities on the most profitable ones.

So, what have we learnt to far? I will now raise some key points that would hopefully generate discussions.

Discussion (I)



- Beyond technological outputs → Transformation of a territory and its citizens
 - New ways of governing;
 - Acculturating citizens;
 - New instrumental logic of innovation: generate economic growth and innovative citizens for an innovative territory
- Experimentation on the part of decision makers (Ehrenstein and Laurent 2015);
 - Experiment with participatory innovation instruments;
 - Experiment with what public authorities are in a changing socio-political order
- Participatory innovation as a means of fostering territorial development through innovation, while delegating to citizens the task of (co-)creating tomorrow's innovations;

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First, participatory innovation as it is conceived and promoted at the European Commission and Wallonia levels goes beyond solely producing technological outputs. It is also, and perhaps more importantly, about transforming a territory and its citizens. As we have seen, it is about developing new ways of governing, acculturating citizens to being innovative. In a way, it shows a dual instrumental logic of innovation, which is expected to generate both economic growth and innovative citizens for an innovative territory.

Second, participatory innovation involves an experimentation on the part of decision-makers (Ehrenstein & Laurent, 2015). The latter experiment with participatory innovation instruments themselves, but they also experiment with themselves, with what public authorities and their role are in a changing socio-political order. Participatory innovation indeed means questioning the triple actors model (academia, industry and Government) and finding new roles for policy-makers.

Overall, participatory innovation is taken up as a means of fostering territorial development through innovation, while delegating to citizens the task of (co-)creating tomorrow's innovation.

This leaves us with important questions...

Discussion (II)



- If innovation-making and territory-making are interrelated...
Then who takes part?
- Economic focus: individual users, consumers;
- The 'creative class' (Florida 2002) as an 'atomized subject'
(Peck 2010) → Individualistic vision of citizenship (Barber 1998)

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If innovation-making and territory-making, are interrelated, then who takes part?

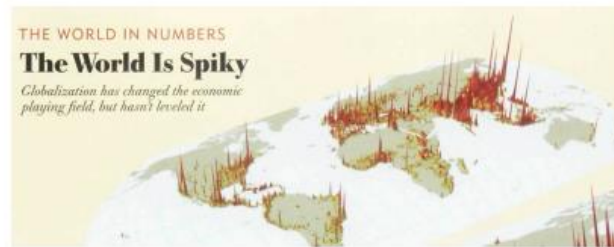
This point is further developed in the papers, but the economic focus of participatory innovation entails a focus, in terms of the involved publics, on individual citizens, frequently conceived as users and consumers.

This raises interrogations around to kind of democratic order participatory innovation contribute to stabilize. The "Creative Class" (Florida, 2002) has been analyzed as an "atomized subject" (Peck, 2010), thinking and acting primarily for each individual's own interest. Participatory innovation would therefore tend to vehiculate an individualistic vision of citizenship (Barber, 1998), that would develop at the expense of more collective forms of conceived publics and their participation in democracy.

Discussion (III)



- Participatory innovation is one instrument in the global competition between territories...
- ... which generates winners and losers
- The circulation of innovation models might just deepen power asymmetries and economic inequalities



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Lastly, I have shown that participatory innovation has become one instrument in the global economic competition between territories. The important question here is: who wins? And who loses? Because as in any competition, there will always be winners and losers. And, as Florida (Florida, 2005) showed, winners and losers tend to remain the same in our globalized economy, and the gap between them tends to grow.

The circulation of innovation models such as participatory ones might therefore just deepen power asymmetries and economic inequalities.

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